

Three Views of Conflict Resolution

adapted from

The Promise of Mediation: Responding to Conflict through Empowerment and Recognition

by Robert A. Baruch Bush and Joseph P. Folger

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Distributive View

"[The distributive] orientation views the sorting out of competing claims for resources as the central activity of conflict resolution. In the distributive view, conflict is defined as an adversarial, winner-take-all contest among competing claimants for resources. The ideal response to conflict is the assignment of contested resources to the party with the superior claim, according to principles of rights and fairness. This orientation underlies the formal legal dispute resolution system, as well as the arbitration process and even adversarial approaches to negotiation (although power rather than principle may determine claims in all three, to varying degrees)." [Bush/Folger at 57]

Integrative View

"[The integrative view] offers an alternative to the distributive outlook, an alternative based on a less adversarial and more expansive view of both resource use and self-interest. It suggests that parties can get more of what they want if they treat conflicts as problems that can be defined mutually and addressed in ways that seek comprehensive solutions. Resources can be expanded, value can be created rather than claimed, and addressing others' needs is the best way to address one's own . . . [P]roblem solving offers real strengths that in themselves are broadly appealing. These strengths are part of the everyday parlance of problem solving today: parties can clarify and pursue their own interests as they consider others' interests; they can enhance both the process and outcome of dispute resolution by emphasizing openness, collaboration, and creativity; and they can avoid the pitfalls of power imbalances, escalation, and destructive avoidance of issues." [Bush/Folger at 57-58]

Transformative View

"[A transformative approach] is successful (1) if the parties have been made aware of the opportunities presented during the [negotiation] for both empowerment and recognition; (2) if the parties have been helped to clarify goals, options, and resources, and then to make informed, deliberate, and free choices regarding how to proceed at every decision point; and (3) if the parties have been helped to give recognition wherever it was their decision to do so. If these specific objectives are achieved, then the more general objectives will also be met, to the greatest degree possible. Parties will experience both strengthening of self and greater actualization of their capacity for relating to others . . . Successful [transformative negotiation] will bring out the intrinsic strength and goodness that lie within the parties as human beings, to the fullest extent possible." [Bush/Folger at 95]